

Bill targeting Lake Erie algal blooms passes Ohio Senate



The Ohio Senate on Wednesday passed a bill aimed at curbing algal blooms in Lake Erie. (AP Photo/Haraz N. Ghanbari)



By [Jackie Borchardt, cleveland.com](#)

[Email the author](#) | [Follow on Twitter](#)

on February 18, 2015 at 2:38 PM, updated February 19, 2015 at 7:20 AM

51
shares

3 Comments

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- The Ohio Senate on Wednesday unanimously approved imposing new regulations to reduce algal blooms in Lake Erie that threatened the water supply for more than 400,000 Ohioans last summer.

The Senate passed Senate Bill 1 in a 32-0 vote, sending it to the House for consideration. But [the House is debating a similar bill](#) and Gov. John Kasich made a few suggestions in his two-year state budget.

"It is time for us to act on what we know we can achieve and get done this spring on this important issue," bill sponsor Sen. [Randy Gardner](#), a Bowling Green Republican, said on the Senate floor. "We know our task is not finished today. ... Senate Bill 1 can be that next important step."

Like the House bill and Kasich's proposal, [Senate Bill 1](#) would prohibit the spreading of manure and fertilizer on frozen ground and saturated soil in the western Lake Erie basin, require water treatment plants to begin monthly monitoring of dissolved phosphorus and ban dumping of dredged material in Lake Erie beginning July 1, 2020.

The Senate plan also requires money in the Healthy Lake Erie fund to be spent on reducing algal blooms in Lake Erie, designates a "harmful algae management and response coordinator" in the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency and prohibits use of pipes and plumbing materials that are not lead free in water systems used to provide drinking water.

"This bill is a science-based, holistic bill because we are all part of the problem," bill sponsor Sen. [Bob Peterson](#), a Sabina Republican, said. "If you flush a toilet, if you operate a farm, if you do anything, you're part of the problem that's creating algal blooms in Ohio."

If approved by the House, the bill would become effective immediately once Kasich signs it into law.

The Ohio Farm Bureau supports the manure and fertilizer provisions but has concerns enacting a law that would immediately take effect would catch most farmers off-guard. Spokesman Joe Cornely said complying with the law might require engineering plans, geological surveys or buying new equipment, among other steps. Cornely said storing cow manure for the affected period can cost between \$400 and \$1,000 per cow.

"We know we've got a role to play in fixing this and we know that there needs to be some new type of regulatory approach -- we just want to get it right because if we don't, there are going to be a lot of unintended consequences," Cornely said.

The bill had broad support from interested parties, but environmental groups had some concerns with the details. The fertilizer and manure protections sunset after five years. The bill was revised to prohibit spreading manure -- not also fertilizer -- when the weather forecast calls for 50 percent or greater chance of precipitation exceeding one-half inch during a 24-hour period and provide several exemptions to the ban.

"The provision seems understandable; plants need nutrients to grow, but there should be some direction that prevents untimely or excessive applications," Adam Rissien, director of agricultural and water policy with the Ohio Environmental Council, said in a statement. "This is especially important for spreading manure. While applications during the growing season help to grow crops, applications to dormant crops on frozen ground are more likely to be lost and cause environmental problems."

Republicans rejected an amendment by Sen. [Michael Skindell](#), a Lakewood Democrat, that would have required statewide testing for microcystin, the toxin produced by algal blooms that tainted Toledo's water supply. Skindell said water quality is not only an issue in the western basin, but also in the central basin near Cleveland as well as local lakes and reservoirs.

"It is essential we ensure the citizens of the state of Ohio we are doing everything we can to ensure the safety of the drinking water supply and mandate the test for microcystins around the state," Skindell said.

Gardner said many water treatment plants already test for the toxin, and state officials are waiting on federal officials to establish standards for how much can be detected in drinking water.

State lawmakers pledged to quickly pass legislation addressing the issue this year after **failing to enact changes at the end of last year**.

Registration on or use of this site constitutes acceptance of our [User Agreement](#) and [Privacy Policy](#)

© 2016 Advance Ohio All rights reserved ([About Us](#)).

The material on this site may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, cached or otherwise used, except with the prior written permission of Advance Ohio

Community Rules apply to all content you upload or otherwise submit to this site.

[Ad Choices](#)